

183. *Vanellus cayennensis* (Gm.). TERO-TERO (their common note).—A beautiful bird, but too well known to need any description. Noisy, quarrelsome, always alert and suspicious, it is the bane of all water-fowl shooting in the marshes, and being itself unfit for the table the sportsman could doubly afford to spare its presence.

It nests at Concepcion often before the middle of August, though eggs may sometimes be found as late as December 1. The eggs are three or four in number, light buff, heavily spotted with deep brown and black, and resemble very closely the eggs of the European Lapwing, and, like these latter, are much sought for as delicacies for the table. We found this species abundant on the pampas in most places, but saw none at Carhué during our stay of ten days there.

(To be concluded.)

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RECENT LITERATURE.

The British Museum Catalogue of Birds.—Two volumes* of this great work have appeared during the last year — Volume VII, by Mr. Sharpe, concluding the family Timeliidæ, and Volume VIII, by Dr. Gadow, treating of the Titmice, Shrikes, Tree-Creepers, and Nuthatches.

“The family *Timeliidæ*, an account of which was commenced in the preceding volume [Vol. VI], is here [Vol. VII] completed, with the enumeration and description of 687 species. Of these no less than 548 are contained in the collection of the British Museum. . . . Out of 163 genera described in the present volume only 14 are unrepresented in the British Museum.” The species of this group are all, except one, inhabitants of the Old World, throughout which they are very generally distributed. They are subdivided into the following ten ‘Groups,’ namely, I, *Thamnobiæ*, with 24 genera and about 90 species;

* Catalogue of the Birds in the British Museum. Volume VII. Catalogue of the Passeriformes, or Perching Birds. Cichlomorphæ: Part IV, containing the concluding portion of the Family Timeliidæ (Babbling Thrushes). By R. Bowdler Sharpe. London: Printed by order of the Trustees. 1883. 8vo, pp. i-xvi, 1-698, pll. i-xv, and numerous woodcuts in the text.

Volume VIII. Catalogue of the Passeriformes, or Perching Birds. Cichlomorphæ: containing the Families Paridæ and Laniidæ (Titmice and Shrikes), and Certhiomorphæ (Creepers and Nuthatches). By Hans Gadow, Ph.D. London: Printed by order of the Trustees. 1883. 8vo, pp. i-xiii, 1-386, pll. i-ix, and woodcuts in the text.

II, Brachypteri, with 19 genera and 47 species; III, Eremometæ, with 11 genera and 46 species; IV, Cisticolæ, with 14 genera and about 93 species; V, Chamææ, with the single species, *Chamæa fasciata* of Western North America; VI, Henicuri, with 3 genera and 11 species; VII, Crateropodes, with 39 genera and 192 species; VIII, Timeliæ, with 34 genera and 96 species; IX, Liotriches, with 17 genera and 56 species; and X, Accentores, with 2 genera and 16 species.

The 'family' Timeliidæ has been often characterized as the ornithological 'waste-basket'—the receptacle of numerous Passeriform birds whose obscure relationships prevent their satisfactory reference to other well-marked family groups, and which lack among themselves any great degree of coherence, or afford as a whole any satisfactorily diagnostic characters. Neither does the group, says Mr. Sharpe, in the present state of our knowledge of the species hitherto 'referred or allied to the typical Timeliidæ,' appear to be susceptible of division into 'well-defined or definable sub-families.' "Hence," he adds, "the views on their systematic arrangement are of necessity subject to frequent changes; and my own, with those of the author of the fifth volume of the present 'Catalogue' [Mr. Seebohm], have consequently undergone considerable modification since the commencement of the printing of the previous volume. I have been obliged to depart from the scheme of classification there proposed; and I have found besides, after a more lengthened study of these birds, that the family, as at present constituted, contains many forms which are not real *Timeliidæ*." With this admission before us it would be ungracious to dwell upon the heterogeneity of the group, till we are able to offer some better scheme of arrangement. While many ornithologists may not agree with the author in his allocation of certain forms, none, we fancy, can feel otherwise than deeply grateful to him for the very useful monograph he has placed at their disposal.

Volume VIII treats of groups having a much wider geographical range than the 'Timeliidæ,' and embrace many American species. Before, however, passing to details, we will venture a few criticisms upon the character of the work in general, mainly apropos of the present volume, but equally applicable in many respects to all the volumes of the series. While recognizing that brevity of treatment is a necessity of the case in such a series of hand-books, it is to be regretted that in many cases the reader is left in the dark as to the reasons that have lead the authors to the conclusions they have adopted, even in cases where a very few additional lines would have been sufficient to set forth the much desired information. We have already adverted on other occasions, in reviewing volumes of this series, to the absence of generic diagnoses, and of comparisons of allied forms, beyond, in most cases, what may be drawn from the 'keys' to the genera and species. These, while proper enough in their way, and a great convenience—indeed indispensable as the work is constructed—fail by a long distance to supply these deficiencies. Again—and also as we have previously remarked—it is difficult to see what rule, if any, is adopted in distinguishing species from subspecies, or subspecies

from 'races,' excepting in the case of Mr. Seebohm's volume. The fact of known or supposed intergradation or its absence, as regards subspecies, is rarely referred to, a subspecies being apparently, and sometimes avowedly relegated to that rank when, in the opinion of the author, it differs too little from another to take the rank of a 'species'; on the other hand, hitherto currently received species are thrown together, although known to present constant, and sometimes well-marked differences, unless the authors have themselves made discoveries which they do not deem it necessary to make known to their readers—and this, too, in cases where their material is but a tithe of what has passed under the eyes of authorities equally entitled to consideration who have published views directly the reverse of their own. It further sometimes happens that the off-hand statement is made that several specimens of a wide-ranging species in the series in the British Museum differ in certain ways from the rest of the series. It would at least satisfy curiosity in such cases if it were stated whether or not these aberrant specimens come from any particular locality or region, or whether the difference is purely individual. Antithetical comparisons as regards size and coloration of forms all too summarily disposed of would oftentimes be well worth the slight additional space such statements would require.

Dr. Gadow's volume opens with the Paridæ (including the Regulidæ *auct.*), of which 10 genera and 82 species are recognized, 48 of the latter being referred to the genus *Parus* alone. Of *Parus* thirteen synonyms are given, two of which (*Melanochlora* and *Lophophanes*), however, are recognized in a subgeneric series. Of a few species local races are recognized, of others, subspecies, and in several both local races and subspecies. Thus *Parus ater* has an 'English,' a 'Chinese,' and a 'Himalayan' race, and in addition three 'subspecies,' respectively from the Caucasus, Eastern Turkestan, and Southern Persia. To the North American *Parus atricapillus* is referred *P. carolinensis* as a subspecies, no other subspecies or races being recognized. 'Subspecies' *borealis* of *Parus palustris* is subdivided into 'Western' and 'Eastern' races. Our *Psaltripari* are referred to the Old World genus *Acredula*; *Auriparus* is referred to Cabanis's African genus *Anthoscopus*, which is here ranked as a subgenus of *Ægithalus*. *Panurus*, although included in the Paridæ, is said (p. 3) not to belong to the family, "but perhaps to the Fringillidæ." *Leptopæcile*, treated under Regulinæ, the author says "does certainly not belong to the Paridæ, but is most closely allied to *Phylloscopus*."

The Laniidæ embrace five subfamilies — Gymnorhininæ, Malaconotinæ, Pachycephalinæ, Laniinæ, and Vireoninæ. The species of the first three are all Old World; those of the last, American. *Lanius* (covering the genera *Fiscus*, *Enneoctonus*, *Phœneus*, *Otomela*, etc., of authors) includes 47 species and 3 subspecies, besides various 'races.' Our '*excubitorides*' is unreservedly (and judiciously) referred to *L. ludovicianus*, while the problematical '*robustus*' is accorded specific rank. The Vireos are all referred to *Vireo*, but *Vireosylva* and *Lanivireo* are recognized in a subgeneric sense. The other genera of the Vireonine group stand as usually

treated; the principal changes in the group as a whole are the degradation of a few commonly recognized species to subspecies, and apparently on wholly reasonable grounds.

The family Certhiidae includes the Nuthatches as well as the Tree-Creepers. To *Certhia familiaris* are referred unconditionally all the Tree-Creepers of Europe and North America, except *mexicana*, which ranks as a subspecies, with a range extending northward along the Pacific coast to Oregon. The birds from Vancouver Island are said to be 'like those from Canada,' yet in the list of specimens cited under 'β. *C. americana*' is one from 'Vancouver Island.' While *C. familiaris* extends eastward in the Old World to Japan, three other species of *Certhia* are recognized as occurring in the Himalayan region. *Sitta carolinensis aculeata* is referred to *S. carolinensis*, with the remark, "the difference between an eastern form (*S. carolinensis*) and a western variety (*S. aculeata*) is said to be that the western individuals have the bill slightly larger [*sic*], and that they have the greater wing coverts [*sic*] less black than the true *S. carolinensis*." And yet the author cites examples from the Rocky Mountains, California, and Mexico! *Sitta villosa* Verr. et auct., of Northern China, is made a subspecies of *Sitta canadensis*! It is said to be "scarcely specifically distinct from the widely ranging North American *S. canadensis*," although it lacks the 'black patch on the sides of the neck' present in *canadensis*, these parts being 'creamy whitish' in *villosa*. Is this case to be taken as a test of the author's idea of 'subspecies'? And if *Sitta carolinensis aculeata*, with its slender bill and indistinct black markings on the inner secondaries (not 'greater coverts,' which in both forms are clear ashy blue) is not to be recognized as a 'race,' what are we to infer is his standard for a 'race'?

In general, Dr. Gadow inclines to the recognition of comprehensive groups, from families downward. His reduction in genera and species from the hitherto current status is very marked. We believe the tendency to be a wholesome one, and that, in the main, his reductions are made with reason, but there are a few cases where we should hesitate strongly before accepting his rulings, as regards both genera and species. His subspecies are obviously what in this country we should consider as distinct though closely allied species, in most cases no intergradation being shown, while in some, from the nature (geographical) of the case, intergradation would be impossible. On the other hand, his 'races' correspond to what we should rank as subspecies. In other instances, geographical variation is pointed out, but the differentiated forms are not recognized in nomenclature, although apparently well-marked, being, in fact, forms which we should regard as subspecific and entitled to nomenclatural recognition. Perhaps, however, he here errs not more on the side of consolidation than we on this side of the water have been at times prone to do in the direction of undue subdivision.

In method of execution, the present volume is strictly in accord with its predecessors, and is neither less valuable nor less welcome.—J. A. A.